

# **Response to USEPA Comments on Habitat Identification Survey Data Report for the Lower Passaic River Study Area Fall 2010 Field Effort, dated March 4, 2011**

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| <b>General Comments</b>  |  |  |  |
| 1                        |  | Inclusion of Appendix E, Photo Log is helpful and informative, especially to reviewers not familiar with the LPRSA. However, these photos were taken by AECOM in support of their efforts to identify human access points along the river and thus are biased in order to capture these points and not habitat. This should be noted in the appropriate sections of the document.  | Agree. Text has been added at the beginning of Appendix E to address this comment.   |
| <b>Specific Comments</b> |  |  |  |
| 2                        | Page 11 and Figure 2-2                                 | Waypoint ID 157 – Please resolve if the location name is Bonsal Wildlife Park or Preserve and correct throughout the document.   | The location name is Bonsal Wildlife Preserve. The report has been revised accordingly.  |
| 3                        | Page 15, Section 2.2.1, First paragraph, last sentence | The sentence seems to suggest that the shoreline was accessed often; however, during the course of the survey only the right shoreline was accessed by foot and was limited to the most upstream reaches of the river where passage by boat was unsafe or not possible near RM 16.5. Please revise to clarify that land-based surveys were limited only to the above mentioned portion of the LPR main stem and that identification of plant species, in general, were made from the boat. | The sentence has been deleted, and the report has been revised to clarify that the shoreline was accessed on foot when boat access was not possible.   |
| 4                        | Page 15, Last paragraph, Second sentence               | Please note the typographical error “the these” and revise as appropriate.   | The word “the” has been deleted.   |
| 5                        | Page 16, Third bullet                                  | It is recommended that herbaceous plants not be included under the community group of “shrub/scrub”. In addition, it is recommended that the group “shrub/scrub” also include shrub/scrub species and not just be limited to understory species. In other words, the group shrub/scrub should be used when discussing shrub/scrub communities.   | The shrub/scrub plant community group bullet has been revised to present examples of species observed: “Includes shrub/scrub species such as groundsel tree ( <i>Baccharis halimifolia</i> ).”   |
| 6                        | Page 17  | Page 17 indicates that human activities and potential exposures along the mainstem of the LPRSA were documented separately by AECOM staff. It would be helpful to clarify if this was covered under the QAPP.  | A phrase has been added to say that the methods used by AECOM to document human activities followed methods detailed in the Benthic QAPP Addendum No. 3, specifically, the LPRSA Human Access/Exposure Identification Survey Form in Attachment T. |
| 7                        | Page 18, Section 3.1.1, First sentence                 | Please note the typographical error (use of generally twice) and revise accordingly.   | The report has been revised.   |

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| 8   | Page 24, Table 3-3                                      | The mudflat located on the right bank of the LPR at Kearney Point (way points 73 and 74) as per Figure 2-1 at the confluence of the LPR and Newark Bay is not included.   | The Kearney Point mudflat was not exposed during the survey and, therefore was not included in the field data as a mudflat. The Kearney Point mudflat has been added to Table 3-3 as requested, and the length and area have been estimated based on aerial photography.   |
| 9a  | Page 25, Section 3.1.2, First paragraph, First sentence | <p>We disagree with the designation of mixed forest in conjunction with scrub/shrub vegetation when describing the lower industrial reaches of the LPR. It is recommended that this group be deleted as all trees noted were sporadic, and when present, consisted of a few individuals or small monotypic stands of ruderal species characteristic of disturbed conditions and not mixed forest.</p> <p>In addition, it recommended that Japanese knotweed be removed when describing these conditions. Japanese knotweed is an emergent species, inclusion in the group of mixed forest or scrub/shrub is incorrect; however, J. knotweed is a dominant species encountered within these reaches and is worthwhile to note.</p> <p>Finally, it is recommended that groundsel tree (<i>Baccharis halimifolia</i>) be included in the description of dominant vegetation. This shrub was observed at several locations on both banks within the lower portion of the LPR south of Newark to approximately RM 2.5.</p> | <p>The designation of the plant community has been revised to be described as mostly composed of scrub-shrub vegetation with individual or small stands of trees present throughout the lower reach.</p> <p>The paragraph has also been revised to mention Japanese knotweed as a dominant emergent species observed frequently in the lower portion of the LPRSA as well as throughout the remainder of the study area.</p> <p>Groundsel tree has been added, as recommended.</p> |
| 9b  | Page 25, Section 3.2.1, First paragraph, Third sentence | Use of the term shrub/scrub to describe communities consisting of <i>Amaranthus</i> , purple loosestrife and goldenrod is incorrect. Although inclusion of the above species is appropriate when describing the vegetation noted, it would be beneficial to include observed species that can be categorized under the term shrub/scrub as the three noted are all emergent herbaceous plants.  | The term shrub/scrub has been replaced with emergent plant to describe the communities, including <i>Amaranthus</i> , purple loosestrife, and goldenrod.   |

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| 9c  | Page 25, Section 3.2.1, First paragraph, Last sentence | The sentence states that "Above RM 16.5 to the Dundee Dam (at RM 17.4) is a large floodplain that has the same plant community characteristic of the rest of the upper portions of the LPRSA". This sentence is confusing as RM 16.5 to 17.4 is the upper portion of the LPRSA. Please revise accordingly.<br><br>In addition, review of oversight notes indicate that floodplain habitat at RM 16.5 is dominated by silver maple ( <i>Acer saccharinum</i> ). It is recommended that this be included in the revision. | A clarification has been inserted to indicate that the "rest of the upper portions" refers to the area between approximately RM 8 to RM 16.5. Silver maple has been added as a dominant tree species. |
| 10a | Page 31-32, Table 3-5                                  | Please include the following commonly occurring species observed within portions of the LPR: groundsel tree ( <i>Baccharis halimifolia</i> ), silver maple ( <i>Acer saccharinum</i> ) and mulberry ( <i>Morus</i> spp.).   | The species have been added as requested.   |
| 10b | Page 31-32, Table 3-5                                  | In the first row under the column "Common Name" please revise to read Pigweed/Amaranth.   | The common name has been revised to be pigweed/amaranth.  |
| 10c | Page 31-32, Table 3-5                                  | Please revise the scientific name for sycamore to <i>Platanus occidentalis</i> , and list as native under the "Status" column.  | The sycamore entry has been revised as requested.   |
| 10d | Page 31-32, Table 3-5                                  | It is unclear as to why weeping willow is labeled as "unidentified". The weeping willow is the only willow species in the northeast that exhibits the characteristic "weeping" foliage. Please also revise the scientific name to <i>Salix babylonica</i> .   | The weeping willow entry has been revised as requested.   |
| 10e | Page 31-32, Table 3-5                                  | It is recommended that yellow aster be revised to read aster.   | The aster entry has been revised as requested.  |
| 10f | Page 31-32, Table 3-5                                  | Yellow willow are native to western and central U.S.; New Jersey is well out of this willow species range. It is recommended that the scientific name be revised to read <i>Salix</i> spp if a positive identification cannot be made.  | The yellow willow entry has been deleted upon review of the field notes, which indicate that the willows observed were possibly yellow or black willow, but positive identification was not made.     |
| 11  | Page 35, Table 3-7 and text elsewhere                  | The term "homeless shelter" is used for several locations. The term "homeless shelter" is defined as a "temporary residences for homeless people. Usually located in urban neighborhoods, they are similar to emergency shelters". It is suggested that a more appropriate term should be used such as homeless camp.   | Homeless shelter has been changed to homeless camp throughout the document.   |

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| 12  | Page 43, Fifth and sixth bullets   | Please revise to read "left bank" as these descriptions pertain to observations of the left shoreline.  | The report has been revised.   |
| 13  | Page 43, Under the section entitled "RM 6.7 to RM 16.2 (right bank)", second bullet, second sentence | In its current form, the statement suggests that access to the river is limited and is only accessed within occasional clearings; however, access to the river in several areas along the RM is unrestrictive even where shoreline vegetation is present as in most areas it is not very dense based on oversight staff observations. It is recommended that the text be revised to say that access to the river is possible through clearings and within areas where vegetation growth is limited.   | Text has been revised as recommended.  |
| 14  | Page 45, Section entitled "RM 16.2 to RM 17.4 (left and right banks)"                                | Please note that all observations of this portion of the river were only made from the right bank. Field crews did not access the left bank during the habitat survey. See Comment 3 above.   | A sentence has been added to this section to clarify that direct access on foot was made on the right bank, and observations of the left bank were made from the shoreline of the right bank.                |
| 15  | Pages 45-46, Table 3-8   | <p>There appears to be a lack of consistency in the Shoreline Category when identifying shoreline types for areas that can be characterized as either bulkhead or mixed vegetation. For example, a review of an oversight photo of Watseeing Park (identified on the table as bulkhead) shows a bulkhead, but also a dense vegetation community on top. Conversely, a review of a photo of location Passaic (identified on the table as mixed vegetation) shows an area that is predominantly bulkhead. Such inconsistencies were noted for the following additional locations: Belleville, Bloomfield, Mills, and JFK Parkway. A review of Table 3-9 on page 47 supports these inconsistencies as under the "Habitat Features" column, bulkheads appear to be the most predominant characteristic at these locations. It is recommended that for these six locations, the shoreline category be classified as bulkhead/mix vegetation.</p> <p>In addition, photos of each of these locations would be helpful to readers while interpreting the table; however, no photos are included in Appendix E (See Comment 20 below).</p> | <p>The shoreline category has been revised for the six locations as requested.</p> <p>Photos were not taken at these locations inasmuch as the shoreline was videotaped; video footage is in Appendix C.</p> |

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| 16  | Page 46, Section 3.2.2, Third sentence     | It is recommended that the mention of ornamental plants be deleted from the text. It is true that ornamental cherry was present along walkways at locations Passaic and Belleville; however, these individuals did not make up the majority of species observed.  | The mention of ornamental plants has been deleted.  |
| 17  | Page 48, Table 3-10                        | Please revise the table for sycamore and weeping willow as per Comment 9 above. In addition, please add tuliptree ( <i>Liriodendron tulipifera</i> ) and willow oak ( <i>Quercus phellos</i> ) to the list as several of these trees were noted at the Bonsal Wildlife Preserve location, and the Passaic location on the Third River, respectively.  | The sycamore and weeping willow entries have been revised as requested.<br>Tuliptree and willow oak have also been added. |
| 18  | Page 50, First paragraph, Last sentence    | It is unclear as to what this sentence is trying to convey as this section's objective is a comparison of the 2010 habitat survey results with Tierra Solutions 1999/2000 surveys which only extended up to RM 7. Any discussion of shoreline characteristics from RM 7 to 17.4 shouldn't apply to this section.  | This sentence has been deleted from this paragraph.   |
| 19a | Page 50, Second paragraph, Second sentence | The text states that "from approximately RM 0 to RM 8, bulkhead and riprap banks separated the shoreline and floodplain from the river, minimizing the area in which forested riparian vegetation can be established". Please delete or revise this sentence as appropriate. Floodplain habitat in these reaches is extremely limited or non-existent. In addition, the absence of forested riparian vegetation is most likely due to the heavily developed nature of this section of river and not due to the placement of riprap or bulkhead. | This paragraph has been deleted because it is redundant with Section 3.2 and not a comparison with historical surveys.    |
| 19b | Page 50, Second paragraph, Fourth sentence | J. knotweed is not a correct example of scrub/shrub vegetation. Please include a more applicable species. See Comment 8a above.   | This paragraph has been deleted (see response to Comment 19a above).  |
| 20  | Page 51, First paragraph, first sentence.  | Please delete J. knotweed as per Comment 8a above.  | This paragraph has been deleted (see response to Comment 19a above).  |

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| 21  | Page 51, Second paragraph          | Text indicates that direct human access is limited because of the nature of the shoreline for the lower six miles. It should also be mentioned that the potential still exists for trespassing and for workers to potentially be exposed. Also make this correction in rest of report as appropriate.  | The habitat survey report is intended to summarize observations and findings in a factual manner. It is not intended to interpret or discuss the significance of the results relative to the conduct of the baseline risk assessment, such as interpretation of the habitat survey results with respect to specific receptors and their potential exposures. No revision has been made to the report based on this comment.                       |
| 22  | Appendix C, Shoreline Video Survey | As per page 23 in Attachment R: SOP – LPRSA Habitat Identification Survey of the Habitat Identification Survey QAPP Addendum the habitat survey video is to be narrated. Use of the table provided in Appendix C is helpful in identifying the reach of river being filmed; however, use of narration or graphic on the video to identify the reach featured would be easier and helpful. It is recommended that graphics or voice be inserted into the video at specific RMs to allow a reviewer to better understand what they are watching. | The video was narrated; however, because of the noise related to wind and traffic, the narration is very difficult to hear. Therefore, the narration was taken off the video to minimize the distraction. The video timestamp log provided in Appendix C is intended to guide the viewer to exact waypoint locations as documented during the survey. It is recommended that viewers use the video timestamp log to navigate the video as needed. |
| 23  | Appendix D, Sheet 7                | An Access to Shore icon should be added to the Pathmark Parking Lot just south of RM 6.5.  | The icon has been added as requested.   |
| 24  | Appendix E, Photo Log              | See Comment 1. In addition to LPR locations, photos of those surveyed along the tributaries should also be provided.   | The photos presented in Appendix E pertain specifically to the features related to human access and use as documented by AECOM, which did not survey the tributaries. Windward videotaped the shoreline of all tributary locations; this videotape is presented in Appendix C.  |